

been rewarded with fifty years of success. Mr. Speaker, please join me in congratulating P.V.'s Hut on its long service to our community and hoping all the best for P.V.'s in the years to come.

INTERNATIONAL REHABILITATION
CENTER FOR TORTURE VICTIMS
RECEIVES CONRAD N. HILTON
FOUNDATION HUMANITARIAN
PRIZE

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 23, 2003

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to call to the attention of my colleagues the leadership shown by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for focusing attention on the widespread use of torture by some outlaw regimes by awarding this year's Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize of \$1 million to the International Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims (IRCT). I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate and pay tribute to the ICRT.

Mr. Speaker, as Co-Chairman of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus I have had the privilege of working with ICRT and its network of affiliates around the world. Every year, the Caucus organizes a public briefing to mark the United Nations "International Day in support of Survivors of Torture," during which we bring together survivors of torture from all over the world, healthcare personnel who assist in their treatment and rehabilitation, Members of Congress, congressional staff and the general public. These briefings are designed to educate our colleagues and their staff, on the practice of torture and the devastating physical and emotional complications that revisit torture victims, and to encourage appropriate Congressional action to address this important issue.

This Hilton Award will be presented to ICRT today at a luncheon in New York City, at which the Dalai Lama will speak. The awarding of this prestigious prize comes at a very appropriate moment, as this Congress is about to re-authorize the Torture Victims Relief Act of 1998 by our adoption of H.R. 1813, which has already been approved by the House Committee on International Relations.

The United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment establishes the basic human right of freedom from torture. Thus far, 134 States have recognized this right by becoming state parties to this important convention. Yet torture continues to take place in more than 117 countries. It is estimated that one-third of the world's 12 million refugees are victims of torture.

Mr. Speaker, torture is a brutal form of social and political control designed to stifle dissent through terror and it violates the basic rights of human beings and is contrary to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and fundamental nature of our Republic. Politicians, journalists, teachers, students, religious leaders, trade union and human rights activists are special targets. The aim of torture is not to kill

the victim, but to break down the victim's personality. Crippled, traumatized, and humiliated, the victims are returned to their communities as a warning to others.

I will not elaborate on the methods and consequences of torture, which my colleagues know well from previous debates here on the House floor. But I would like to emphasize again that there are an estimated 500,000 torture survivors in the United States alone—refugees and asylum-seekers who have fled repressive regimes. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of victims of torture seeking help at U.S. rehabilitation centers, and many centers now have long waiting lists. In the United States there are 25 rehabilitation centers and programs joined together under the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs. The passage of the Torture Victims Relief Act in 1998 positioned the United States as a leading donor to the work against torture. The re-authorization of this legislation, which the Committee on International Relations reported to the House on July 23rd, will continue and expand American leadership to assist those who have been subject to this terrible human rights abuse. I urge the House leadership to schedule this bill for floor action as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly summarize for my colleagues the global efforts that IRCT has undertaken to eliminate torture and to explain the extraordinary work they are accomplishing now. The medical response to torture began in 1973 with an Amnesty International campaign calling for help to diagnose torture victims. At that time, very little was known about torture methods or the physical or psycho-social consequences for torture victims. An Amnesty group of four doctors in Denmark was the first to respond and was soon joined by a network of some 4,000 medical doctors from 34 countries worldwide. It quickly became evident that, in addition to documenting cases of torture for use in potential legal proceedings, it was also critical to identify methods to help treat and rehabilitate victims of torture.

In 1982, the first rehabilitation center was founded and established by medical humanitarian my dear friend Dr. Inge Genefke and the Rehabilitation and Research Center for Torture Victims (RCT) in Copenhagen, Denmark. As the global movement developed, and the need for global support increased, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) was founded in 1985, initially as the international arm of the RCT, until 1987 when it became a fully independent organization. IRCT's mission, with Dr. Genefke as its Ambassador, is to support and promote the rehabilitation of victims of torture, to advocate for the prevention and eradication of torture worldwide, and to provide documentation and research that will ultimately bring perpetrators to justice.

Mr. Speaker, from a handful of rehabilitation centers in the mid-1980s, a global network of 200 rehabilitation centers and programs is now operating in 80 countries. These efforts, however, are just a beginning in the global fight against torture. To keep a spotlight on the issue, IRCT's global campaign, "Together against Torture," involves more than 10,000 people and 300 organizations in some 100

countries every year to commemorate the United Nations International Day in Support of Torture Victims, which takes place annually on June 26.

In recent years, IRCT has developed successful models in post-conflict interventions in support of torture victims in East Timor, Kosova, and in Pakistan for Afghan refugees. The IRCT Documentation Center is the world's largest library on torture-related research and IRCT is initiating the first comprehensive monitoring and documentation system on torture at the global, regional, and national levels.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, let me mention to my colleagues statements from global leaders in support of IRCT.

Dr. Bertrand Ramcharan, Acting U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said: "Torture is a violation of basic human rights. Through extensive documentation and research, IRCT has become an essential source for governments and legal authorities in their efforts to expose atrocities and to bring perpetrators to justice."

Mary Robinson, former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Ireland, said: "Through its support for victims and its global campaigning for the universal ratification and implementation of the U.N. Convention Against Torture and its Optional Protocol, the IRCT reminds us of our shared responsibility for ending torture throughout the world."

Former United States President Jimmy Carter said, "Freedom from torture is one of the most fundamental of all human rights principles, enshrined in the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) and other international agreements. This year, it is particularly fitting that the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation has chosen to bestow its Humanitarian Prize on the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, an organization that has done so much to end torture and to support its victims worldwide."

Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Per Stig Miller said, "There is no doubt that IRCT has had a determining role in placing torture and organized violence onto the international agenda and that the organization has achieved a special recognized status and voice that is listened to worldwide. The prize underlines the need for continued international support towards the work of the IRCT."

Dr. Reiner Brettenhaler, President of the Standing Committee of European Physicians, said: "We are proud to nominate the IRCT for this year's Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize. A unique strength of the IRCT is its approach to the work against torture: focusing on the medical aspects of torture, thereby focusing on the individual recovery of those subjected to this act of inhumanity."

Mr. Speaker, I again want to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to the ICRT and its global network of treatment and support centers for their continued invaluable service to humanity. I also want to commend the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for recognizing and supporting the ICRT's efforts by awarding it the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize.